TOWN & COUNTRY CHURCH

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Life in a Hamlet

C. R. McBRIDE

• When one travels by train or by auto over some of our highways, the small villages and hamlets of our country do not make favorable impressions. One must live in them to see and appreciate their values.

The hamlet in which I lived for nine years was part of a much larger community. There was a town about eight miles distant where some five thousand persons lived, and there many of us went for general shopping and recreation. Twenty-six miles in another direction was a small city of sixty-five thousand persons. Occasionally we went to this city. And sometimes we traveled thirty-five miles in another direction to a still larger city. Some of our men had jobs in these larger places and commuted daily to their places of work.

Material Things

The houses in our hamlet were warm in winter and not at all uncomfortable in summer. There was no community water system but every household had its own well and in most cases the water was pumped by electricity and piped into the modern houses. Electricity had come when the people organized their cooperative electric company. Television was not developed to the popular state it enjoys today but radios were in all of the homes and even in the barns.

The farms were well kept. Many people lived and worked on them. These farms had been supporting families for more than a hundred years and one could imagine they would continue to support families for many more years. There was no unemployment in the hamlet. Young and old were well provided for.

Education

There was a state grade school. Built of brick, it was a two-room, two-teacher school. Only teachers with considerable experience and training were employed by the school board. There were open-country schools near the hamlet which were staffed with teachers of less experience and educational background, but these schools were in the process of being closed and the children were taken to our school.

Only four miles away there was a village where years before a county agricultural high school had been established. The boys from the farms, as well as their sisters, attended this agricultural school. Those who felt they did not want agricultural training went to the high school in the larger town eight miles away.

The two larger cities previously mentioned had college facilities so that young people who wanted college training were within commuting distance. And less than a hundred miles away was the state university.

But not all educational experiences are found in schools. As a part of the educational life of the hamlet the church led in the or-

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U.S.D.A. Photo by Knell

Photo by A. Devaney, N. Y.

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ganization of a 4-H Club. This club was once the largest in the state, with well over one hundred boys and girls enrolled and more than three-fourths of them completing their projects.

On the level of adult education there was the Farmers' Winter-Night College which attracted people from the entire community. It functioned for a number of years with an attendance of upward of three hundred persons. The college was not for farmers alone; neither was it in the strictest sense a college. It was organized for the adults of the area and was held the six Monday nights previous to Thanksgiving Day. It was so well regarded that it was featured in some of our national magazines.

In addition to these projects there were women's clubs and study groups that made a rich contribution to the intellectual life of their members.

Social Life

Visiting played a vital part in hamlet living. Families came together on Sundays and on every possible anniversary and holiday for dinners and fellowship. The pastor of the church was often a welcome guest at these family gatherings.

For almost forty years a bi-weekly dinner was held in the church hall. To this dinner came the school children and their teachers, the farmers and the women.

The churches throughout the area (Protestant and Roman) had a custom of giving a pre-Thanksgiving Day dinner, for which they charged a nominal price. The dinner patrons were not confined to the immediate neighborhood where the dinner was held, but came from all over the larger community.

Then there was the drama society, organized under a previous pastor. Having a flair for the dramatic he wrote a play which was highly acclaimed and received national recognition. At the time of the hamlet's centennial celebration a pageant was prepared, which was given on two evenings. Upward of a hundred persons participated in the pageant, which depicted the life of their hamlet.

The annual 4-H Fair was another social event to which as many as a thousand persons came to see the handiwork of the young people. At one time a state representative travelled from Washington, D. C. in order to be the principal speaker at the evening meeting of the 4-H Fair.

Then there was the Ladies' Aid. For some vague reason there had been a disagreement and half the women left the Ladies' Aid and organized a Civic Club. These two groups met on alternate weeks with some ladies belonging to both organizations. Both were service organizations and sought to outdo one another in their good deeds. The Ladies' Aid specialized on the things of the church while the Civic Club specialized on things of the community—or so they said. However, it was noticeable that the Civic Club took over the care of the church lawns. This cost a great deal of money but they cheerfully shouldered their burden and made the church grounds the most beautiful spot in the county. To raise money they held an annual flower show which was attended not only by the people of the immediate community but by people from both cities previously mentioned.

The men were not so fortunate in their organizations. They did have at one time a brotherhood as a part of their church work. It functioned spasmodically and no one seemed to notice when it went out of business. However, the men belonged to the cooperatives and found much of their social life in the activities of their various cooperative organizations.

For the young people there were youth meetings and the 4-H Club, besides high-school activities. The young people did not confine their meetings to Sunday nights or the use of church buildings. For about nine months of the year they met Thursday nights in the homes of the various members. The meetings were usually of two or three hours' duration and included devotions, choir rehearsal, and parlor games. These meetings were interspersed with trips to nearby places of interest.

The annual Christmas program was a noteworthy social event. The

five or six schools of the area, the church and the young people's organization planned the community Christmas-tree program for the week before Christmas. It was held in the community hall and all the groups cooperated. Of course, the hall was filled and at the end of the program Santa Claus made his appearance with at least one gift for every youth present.

Religious Life

It was the religious life that made living in the hamlet a rich experience. Years before *one* church had been decided upon and a church building had been constructed, which included the sanctuary and plenty of room for Sunday school classes. Adjacent to the church was a two-story community hall. The upper floor was used as an auditorium, as it had a well-equipped stage. The lower floor of the hall was a dining room with a modern kitchen from which the women served meals.

Adjacent to the hall the people built a seven-room parsonage where the people of the church and community expected the pastor to live. Practically all the activities of the hamlet revolved around the church. Here was Christian education for young and old. Here there were weddings, funerals, baptisms. It was the church that took the lead in the social life, in athletics, in 4-H Fairs, in dinners and receptions, in the Farmers' Winter-Night College.

The pastor's home was open from time to time for the activities of youth and children's groups, as well as some adult study groups.

In this hamlet lived Protestants, Catholics and non-confessors. Everyone knew everyone else and everyone was concerned for everyone else. This knowledge made for the most wholesome kind of living. If we can believe such historians as Hendrik Willem Van Loon, it was in such an environment as this that the ancient Greeks lived. Of them he writes in *The Story of Mankind:* "In this school the Greeks learned to excel in many things. They created new forms of government and new forms of literature and new ideals of art which we have never been able to surpass. They performed these miracles in little villages that covered less ground than four or five modern city blocks."

America needs to give more thought to hamlet and village life where there is time to create new and great things for the glory of God.

Rural Life Sunday, May 11, 1958

• Rural Life Sunday will again be observed on Rogation Sunday, the fifth Sunday after Easter, May 11.

This year's order of service was prepared by the Rev. Mark Rich, Missouri School of Religion, Columbia, Missouri.

Copies may be obtained from your cooperating home mission board or from the Department of Town and Country Church, National Council of Churches, 257 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y., at the following rates: Single copies, 5 cents each; 100 copies or more, $1.50 for each 100 copies. Carriage extra on quantity orders.

Prayer

• Our Father, we ask thy blessing upon those who seek to uphold justice in town and country, through teaching, example, and administering the law. May they not be hardened to tragedy, indifferent to suffering, or unaware of Christ's love for all, even the least of mankind. Guide them to be thoughtful at their work, diligent in weeding out poor conditions, patient in dealings with legalities, alert for opportunities of rehabilitation.

Strengthen us all to serve better thy Son, who was concerned more with the spirit than with the letter of the law. In his name we ask it. *Amen.*

—HUGH OUTTERSON

Next Issue

• The next issue of TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH will be dated September, 1958. We do not publish during June, July or August.

The Rev. Richard O. Comfort, Executive Director of the National Council of Churches' Department of Town and Country Church (right), confers with Congressman B. Carroll Reece of Tennessee and Explorer John I. Rankin at a Boy Scout breakfast in Washington, D. C.

The Rural Church in Declining Areas of Population

CARL GEORES

• Scattered across our country are many rural communities that no longer have an adequate rural church at the center of their lives. In commuinties where the population has been moving away, where the economy has steadily declined, where denominational cooperation has not been known, the rural church has, in many cases, lost its influence, its sense of mission, its very reason for being. Many communities have churches that are only shells. Perhaps they have a worship service and a small Sunday school, attended by only the faithful few. Certainly we cannot underestimate the effect of this witness in the community, but its light is weak and seen by only a few.

The problem of restoring life in these small rural churches is of the utmost importance, for the most important export that will ever come from these small towns will be people—young people who will join the ever-increasing flood of people who will live in America's cities and suburbs.

Approach

The most important factor in restoring life in the rural churches in declining areas is leadership. Ministers who are called to serve in small towns must understand their communities, their people and their own task. Community structures will vary, people will have their own particular needs, but the minister's task will be the same in any community. It can be defined as containing three levels of approach:

1. The basic approach is to the individual and must be one of compassion, love, and challenge to accept and follow Jesus Christ.

2. The second is through the church with an adequate program that trains the congregation in an understanding of its task, and helps the congregation to become an instrument in the hands of God to do his will.

3. The third is to serve the needs of the whole community and provide the vision, ideals and goals for the community. In addition, the church should widen the world outlook of the people in the community.

The most basic task of the minister's life is his ministry of love and compassion to the people he serves. His authority for this phase of his ministry comes from Jesus Christ himself. Our Lord helped people. He was concerned about their most basic needs. Blind Bartimaeus needed his sight. The woman at the well needed a friend. The woman taken in adultery needed forgiveness and a new start in life; Zachaeus needed a new life. Jesus loved them all and gave them what they needed. So the pastor, ministering to his people, shares the love and concern of Christ with his people, irrespective of whether or not they have joined his church. I am sure that Jesus was never particularly concerned about the church affiliation of the people he met. He came to help and save all men.

There is no excuse for a rural pastor to fail to know all of the people of his parish. He should visit their homes, share their fears, concerns, their hopes and dreams, and be prepared to offer counsel and help in the hundreds of different situations that will come to light. The minister who takes this basic task seriously will find many opportunities to point his people to Jesus Christ and to help them understand the meaning of committing their lives to his service. Laymen will often be effective at this point if they are trained and know how to share their faith.

The second phase of the minister's task is to train the local church through its total program. The basic purpose for a church program is to help people of the congregation to understand the meaning of the Christian life within the context of their environment and to help the whole congregation to become a living instrument in the hands of God. The basic purpose for any organization within the church program is to help people grow in their understanding of how to live Christian lives in the world and to help them to work together as part of a great world-wide fellowship of people who belong to Christ.

The church program should include only those things that are needed. It should be family-oriented whenever possible to make it possible for families to be held together and their solidarity increased. Teachers and leaders must be carefully trained so that they understand how their efforts help to fit into the overall church program. Efforts must be made to see that every person has a responsibility within the church life.

The third approach to make the rural church meaningful and relevant is the approach to the community at large. It is at this point that many rural churches fail to see their mission. The church is viewed by those on the outside as one of the many organizations within the overall community structure. We must accept that view and be as friendly and cooperative as possible with other organizations at work in the community.

Occasionally the church will be able to lead the way in meeting definite community needs. Perhaps a better school system is needed, or a dynamic program for all young people. We can cooperate and sometimes provide facilities and leadership for projects of that type. Much can be done to break down community prejudices and build bonds of loyalty and friendship.

The most important witness in the community will come from the people of the church. As they live—so will the community see the church. The closer we are all drawn to Christ and *live* our faith, the more relevant will be our witness in the community.

Town & Country Church

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Contributors of articles to TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH speak for themselves and not for the National Council of Churches or sponsoring organizations.

Purposes of This Journal

The purposes of this Journal are:

A. To encourage cooperation among rural churches.

B. To improve the administration of the local church, this to include organization of the church, finance, religious education, community relationships, and the training of lay leadership.

C. To stimulate the development of a Christian philosophy of rural life, this to embrace ethical issues in agriculture, social reconstruction, and government programs; and the content of the minister's message.

Part of Larger Program

The Journal is an important part of an enlarged "cooperative rural church program" that will encourage a national "rural church movement."

Your Church can be Stronger Through Cooperation

MARK RICH

• You are greatly interested in your church. You want it to serve your community, the individuals, the families, youth, all ages. You want your church to have a dynamic Christian witness.

But is your church doing that? The Missouri church study shows that members want their churches to be much more effective than they are. They want a larger program, more community service and a larger membership and a more effective church.

How does your church rate?

There are many things to be done to improve the church. If a church is small with limited prospects, it may want to try some form of interchurch cooperation.

Churches, like schools, are getting together. The way they work together varies. As communities get larger and neighborhood populations decline, the press for some form of cooperation increases.

There are approved ways by which churches work together. Interchurch cooperation can take place within the framework of denominational loyalties. The pattern is not always the same. The results can be good.

If your church is interested in more cooperation, study the following forms. One may apply to your situation:

The Interchurch Council or The Local Council of Churches

When two or more churches in a village or town name an interchurch committee to carry out certain cooperative functions, it may be called an Interchurch Council or a local Council of Churches. The form is simple. Churches elect representatives who meet at stated or special times to plan certain mutually approved activities. These programs often include cooperative vacation Bible schools, union services, union surveys, union evangelistic efforts, and union leadership training sessions.

The advantage of this arrangement is that a constituted committee has responsibility for planning those things which churches want to do together. There is no need to set up a committee for each occasion. The planning responsibility is recognized and carried out systematically.

Another advantage is that churches present a common front in working with the schools and other community agencies.

The chief difference between an Interchurch Council or a local Council of Churches and a Larger Parish is that the functions of the council are more limited, and the churches cooperate to a somewhat lesser degree, and more frequently it does not include the open-country churches.

The Larger Parish

The Larger Parish associates several churches of a larger community or area with one another to do those things that can be done better together than separately.

Each church remains distinct and carries on its own program. Each church appoints members to a Larger-Parish committee or council. This committee plans a cooperative program. Where there is more than one minister or special worker, these form a staff. There is a Larger-Parish budget.

The Larger Parish seeks to serve all the people of the area with a comprehensive program.

The Larger Parish groups small churches so that individually and collectively they can serve the people of an area with a broader program. It gives the small church some of

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the advantages of size, often providing every-Sunday services.

The Larger Parish can be made up of churches of one denomination. It works best when the churches are adjacent to one another making one block of territory to be served by the parish. There are successful interdenominational parishes. Several denominations have approved and adopted forms of the Larger Parish such as the *Grouping of Churches*, *The Group Ministry*, and the *Pastoral Unity*.

The Denominational Community Church

The straight Community Church has no denominational ties. We do not recommend this form. The Denominational Community Church retains its ties. Though related to one denomination, it seeks to serve members of other denominations who have no near-by local church.

The organizational form is as follows: A Presbyterian church, for instance, wants to become a denominational community church. It opens its membership to persons of other affiliations. They can retain their own denominational status on the clerk's book. The church begins to serve *all* people in the community who have no other church association. The church preaches the doctrine of Christian unity which Jesus explains in *John* 17.

There are many advantages. Most communities cannot afford a local church for each different denominational group. People are accustomed to moving from one evangelical church to another. The denominational community church is likely to be larger and thus have more possibility for a strong ministry. Its emphasis on unity is consistent with the thinking of many churches and Christians.

The Federated Church

The Federated Church brings two or more churches of different denominations together into one church with each denominational group retaining the denominational character and association. There is one program and one minister. Benevolences go to the separate denominations in the federation. It has been used principally in overchurched places and among evangelical churches. There are notable examples of successful federated churches.

There are real advantages. The size of the church is increased to provide more support, equipment, and program. Where all the churches in a community enter, the federation provides a service to all the people of the community. It makes easier cooperation with community agencies. It permits members to retain historic denominational associations and continue their support of them.

Other Types of Cooperative Churches

There are several other types of cooperative churches. If the foregoing do not fit your needs, you may want to look into the following:

The *Exchange of Churches* takes place when, for instance, a Methodist church in one town closes to leave the field to a stronger Presbyterian church. In another town the weaker Presbyterian church closed in favor of the Methodist church.

The *Union Church* takes on several forms. Sometimes two or more churches will unite to become one church related to the two or more denominations.

The *Multidenominational Church* usually is a new church which elects relationship with two or more denominations chiefly found in its membership.

How to Go About Getting a Cooperative Church

1. Request your denominational director of Town and Country Church work or the State Council of Churches to give you leadership assistance.

2. Survey the area where churches are interested or need some kind of cooperative endeavor.

3. Have a meeting of the representatives of the local churches to study the situation and possibilities.

4. If there is interest in further exploration, the representatives may constitute a committee for further study and planning.

5. The committee has several meetings to study possibilities and to make plans.

6. A large meeting for laymen may be called when outside speakers testify to the effectiveness of cooperative churches.

7. The committee brings recommendations to a large representative meeting.

8. When the meeting accepts the report the recommendations are taken back to each church for approval.

9. Each church at time of approval names its representatives to the permanent cooperative council (with some exceptions).

10. The cooperative council meets, organizes, and begins to function.

Your Harvest Festival

• The Department of Town and Country Church, National Council of Churches, will again have available by August 15th its annual Order of Service for a Harvest Festival. It will be so arranged that it will be ready for use by a congregation. You may procure it from your cooperating home mission board or the office of *Town and Country Church*. Single copies will be 5 cents each, postpaid. Rates will be quoted later on quantities.

E.U.B. History

• *How Churches Pioneer in American Communities*, by Robert M. Todd, published in 1957 by the H. E. Swihart Printing Company, White Pigeon, Mich., presents the Origin and Development of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, the Present Distribution and Condition of its Churches, and the Current Program and Training for Service in Town and Country.

The author is pastor of the Corinth Evangelical United Brethren Church at Muncie, Indiana.

Rural Baptist Church of the Year

HENRY A. McCANNA

The Rural Baptist Church of the Year Award made annually by the Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Kansas City, Kansas, goes to the Ollie Baptist Church of Ollie, Iowa, for 1958. Ollie is a village of 300 persons in the southeastern section of Iowa near the city of Ottumwa. Many of the residents commute to Ottumwa for work but for the most part the members of this church are farmers.

While many rural churches are struggling to survive, the Ollie Baptist Church has grown and has a bright future. Evidence of the vitality of this church can be seen in the fact that there are 146 resident members and the budget for 1958 is nearly $10,000.

In 1944 the Ollie church building burned down, but the members rallied around the leadership of their pastor and made plans for a new building. Due to the death of the pastor, however, the new church building was not completed until 1948.

By providing an adequate parsonage and salary the church is blessed with the services of a dedicated and qualified rural pastor and his family. The Rev. Orval Roach had opportunities to serve in many larger churches, but he chose Ollie. This pastor and his family are always in the center of any worthy community project. Mr. Roach has proven that effective evangelism in rural areas may include driving the school bus to get better acquainted with the young people, helping to obtain a new fire truck and serving as a volunteer fireman, sharing in the harvesting of crops, or outdoing the men in wood chopping.

Service to the youth of the church and the community includes opportunity to sing in the youth choir, 4-H Club and scout activities, and The Baptist Youth Fellowship. A special project was the "Byfnik" which took place on Halloween. The boys and girls went around the town on a hayride, collecting money for the Christian Rural Overseas Program.

For two years the church has participated in the Eight Step Every Member Enlistment Program. This has resulted in the budget being increased by about one-third. The current Lay Development program is meeting with enthusiastic response. Certainly the Ollie Baptist Church has proven the effectiveness of Lay Leadership.

The members of this church are good stewards of the soil and also of the soul. There is devotion toward the land and in the home. Not content to merely make their own community a good place in which to live, the members of the Ollie Baptist Church serve as civic leaders throughout the county. And they are always ready and willing to help those in need.

Throughout the years of steady progress the Ollie Baptist Church has tried to keep her spiritual light shining. The members may not be many in number, but they really count for an effective Christian witness.

Ollie Baptist Church

Menno Simons

(Founder of the Mennonite Sect)

MILLEN BRAND

Menno Simons, plain son
of Dutch peasants, born in Friesland
read Luther, *On the Freedom*
of a Christian Man, and thought.
Thought against the church's wall
and tightened his weak flesh
toward the people's "hunger and need."
Took the call then to lead
the brethren in the long years
of the church within the self.
Fearing death, he went on.
Tjard Reynders sheltered him
"out of compassion and love" . . .
discovered later, Tjard was broken
on a wheel, and died
"an unblamable man."
Menno himself worked on
until his years cracked.
He died
in dark Wuestenfelde
and was buried secretly.
War erased his grave,
but the church he lived for
lives on in plain men,
a moment of the long day
the martyrs and the dreamers make
against surrounding shade.

Notes on Recollections

VIII. Discovery of the Poets

BENSON Y. LANDIS

• My discovery of the poets who have emphasized rural symbols and experiences was as unplanned as the career of the average ecumenical administrator. I suppose there was a latent interest from the days when we read Bryant and Longfellow and Whittier at school. I cannot recall that college classes in English literature led me to read Wordsworth.

My recollection is that I ran across the writings of George W. Russell, the Irish poet and editor who used the strange pen name of AE, as I got into the literature on the country life movements here and abroad. Walt Whitman I rediscovered once when I compiled a comprehensive bibliography on democracy. I found few books on poetry that I wished to include, but I listed eagerly *Leaves of Grass* by the good grey poet of democracy.

I was also much impressed by the remark of a friend who said I ought to write poetry because I was actually interested in what might be called the poets' insights. I recall hearing Mark Dawber say that we need the poets' insights on Easter Sunday morning. I had not written poetry since I had won a poetry prize in high school. Subsequently I wrote perhaps fifty poems, publishing some of them under pen names.

I soon found that to write poetry one must have both a mood and, somewhat less often, an occasion. A poem once came to me when I observed the first pale green leaves among budding trees from a train window. Another poem came as I crossed the beautiful Susquehanna River on the bridge at Havre de Grace, Maryland.

When AE came to America to lecture in 1930, I went eagerly to hear him at the Town Hall in New York. A rather small group came to hear him on "The Building Up of a Rural Civilization." I was fascinated by his reading of his own lines, his comments, and his personality. He made a chance remark that those who wished to arouse interest in rural life in America should seek the aid of the poets. "It ought not to be hard to interest a man like Robert Frost."

A few months later Robert Frost began to read poetry and lecture one evening a week at the New School for Social Research in New York. I registered and was soon one of a large audience that heard Mr. Frost. He read and made unsystematic comments between his readings. But they were incisive remarks that held his audience.

Frost appears to be casual when he expresses wisdom with both depth and breadth. He is, in short and plain terms, a philosopher, a thinker in a world of clamor and confusion. I was spellbound as he demonstrated the way he had taken the cadences of simple speech, "the people talking," and transmuted the talking into high beauty and memorable rhythm.

I decided to ask Mr. Frost for an interview, which he readily granted by calling out my name after one of the readings. We met the next morning at the apartment of one of his dramatist friends in New York. I went without a set of questions. Mr. Frost spoke eagerly, elaborating his first sentence: "Poetry is of the country, very rural."

My latent interest in Henry David Thoreau became very evident when I found opportunity to visit Concord, Mass., on several occasions. One hundred years after Henry Thoreau had stamped out of Concord to take up residence at the cabin he had built at Walden Pond, I wrote and found publishers for three articles about the famous squatter on Emerson's land. Thoreau was so good an observer that his jottings about the world of nature now are said to have scientific value.

But Thoreau spurned an invitation to join the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was really a most versatile man whose somewhat poetic prose—in which he imbedded much of poetry—has won him a secure place in world literature. I hold that Thoreau was in his deepest nature a poet. He was poetic when he observed that the builders of the railroads were simply trying to give us improved means to seek unimproved ends. He was poetic in his ideas on education, in his antipathy toward the rising commercialism, in his attitude toward the power of the state, in his non-cooperation with the churches.

Vachel Lindsay I rediscovered when I once found that I could spend a brief time in Springfield, Illinois, between appointments in Missouri and northern Illinois. I found rich local sources on the poet who was always singing about the village of God. I started at the public library, and then interviewed a few people. I met a man past ninety who had known not only Vachel Lindsay but also the poet's father, the practical doctor who did not understand his poetic son. It seems that Vachel Lindsay was often regarded in Springfield as peculiar—he wrote poetry. Near Springfield they named a large bridge for a man who wrote a poem, "Let not our town be large."

In the Middle Western farm journals I found occasional references to the poetry of James Hearst, and I recall that Mrs. Raymond Sayre used to quote him. I found that he succeeded well in his poetry in expressing his aim—neither to idealize farm life nor to describe it as dark or sordid. He is also a man who sees well the role of the farm in civilization from the days of the Greeks onward.

Thus I began to accumulate volumes of the writings of our American rural poets, and to assemble brief materials on their careers. I was never able to meet the late Robert P. Tristram Coffin who wrote of "Strange Holiness" and

many other themes from the state of Maine. I came to admire both his insights and his forms of expression.

One winter month I gave most of my "spare time" to reading a thorough biography of Whittier. On a visit to Frederick, Maryland, I went into Barbara Fritchie's home, and recalled Whittier's account of the meeting of a brave woman and a brave soldier, Stonewall Jackson. In the home, one finds available Whittier's poem, which concludes:

And ever the stars above looked down
On the stars below in Frederick town.

On rereading Bryant one is always impressed by the fact that he wrote "Thanatopsis" at age 17 in the home of his father, a country doctor, and that many have called it the first great poem written in America. He wrote good poetry to the end. And Edwin Markham's social and religious passion is good for study and re-study. He was undoubtedly one of the great poets of the social gospel.

"The Modern Agriculture Revolution"

• "This is the day of science and technology in agriculture. . . . Technological changes have resulted in starting increases in output per acre, per animal, and in total farm output. The physical volume of output of U.S. farm products in 1956 was about fifty per cent above a quarter of a century ago. Crop production per acre has gone up a third. Livestock production per animal unit of breeding stock was more than a fourth above the 1930-33 period. The larger output was produced with about a third fewer farm workers. This means that the output per worker in 1956 was more than double that of the 1930-33 period." A "truly significant fact is that the real net income per farm worker is about double the level of 1929."

These lines are from an address, title above, by Earl L. Butz, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, before the 1957 meeting of the Texas Agricultural Workers Association.

"The family farm is larger and stronger." There were about 4,800,000 farms in the U.S. in the fall of 1954. About two-thirds of these were commercial farms "in that they provided the major source of employment and income for the farm family." The others were mainly residential farms, or units operated with only part of the time of the operator. The average size of commercial farms "increased from 220 acres in 1939 to 336 acres in 1954," an increase of forty-one per cent in fifteen years. The latest census of agriculture "showed a fourth of all farmers having 100 days or more of non-farm work" a year.

On the situation of, and prospects for, the family farm Mr. Butz generalized as follows:

"Much public discussion has recently been directed toward the decrease in the number of farms and the tendency toward increased size of commercial farms. Interest is focused on the family farm and its chances for survival in an increasingly mechanized and complex agriculture. The fear is that if the family farm cannot survive we will lose some of the cultural values associated with rural life.

"We must, of course, always be concerned about the family farm. But the plain fact is that the family farm in American agriculture is not losing ground. The position of the family farm in our economy has actually strengthened in recent years.

"We are all familiar with the unprecedented increase in the productive capacity of a given labor force on our farms. Under these conditions, growth in farm size is a normal, healthy, and inevitable development. To prevent this growth, either directly or indirectly, would be to deny the family the right to make a decent living on the family farm. This would indeed be the end result of some politically inspired farm programs designed to maintain a large number of less than economic-sized family farms.

"Here in America we have a solid foundation of family farming, and it is being well maintained and strengthened. Family farms control approximately the same proportion of the total acreage in farms as in 1940, and produced last year about the same share—roughly two-thirds—of the total agricultural output. Family-operated farms comprise about ninety-seven per cent of all farms in the United States.

"The family farm of today is much larger than the family farm of twenty-five or even fifteen years ago. It is larger in terms of acreage farmed and also in terms of market sales. But it is still a family farm.

"Science and mechanization have enabled the family farm to become a more efficient, up-to-date business operation that is capable of keeping abreast of the scientific advances in production practices. As a result, the family farm is able to provide the farm family with the ever-increasing level of living all of our farm people desire and deserve."

I Am Habit

I can either make or break thee;
Through each day I slowly mould thee;
Soon my tightening chains enfold thee;
Then it is with ease I hold thee;
I am Habit!

I can be both good and vile;
I can e'er be worth your while;
Or the cause of your decrial;
I am Habit!

Oft I've proved myself a pleasure;
Proved myself a priceless treasure;
Or a menace past all measure;
I am Habit!

Harmless though I sometimes seem, yet
My strange force is like a magnet;
Like a great and greedy dragnet;
I am Habit!

Though you sometimes fear or doubt me,
No one yet has lived without me;
I am present all about thee;
I am Habit!

Choose me well when you are starting;
Seldom is an easy parting;
I'm a devil or a darling!
I am Habit!

—Author Unknown

Town and Country Church Publications

The Department of Town and Country Church of the National Council of Churches has the following items for sale:

Town and Country Churches and Family Farming, by Marshall Harris and Joseph Ackerman $1.50
(102-page book with many illustrative pictures)

Study guide to accompany the above book, bearing the same title ..... .10

Study of Low-Income Farm Families in Two Southern Rural Communities ..... .75
(Prepared for the Department by the National Council of Churches' Bureau of Research and Survey)

Poetry and Rural Life, by Benson Y. Landis ..... .50
(An interpretation of some American poets and their writings on rural values)

The Church and the Rural Community ..... .10
(A Proposal and A Guide for One-Day Institutes Dealing with Family Farm Problems)

Overstock

The Department of Town and Country Church wants to clear its shelves and offers the following items to you at less than half price, as long as they last:

Reports of the 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956 Convocations on the Church in Town and Country ....per copy .20

Report of the conference held at Louisville, Ky., in 1955 on *The Christian Farmer and his Land* ..... .20

Study guide to accompany *The Christian Farmer and his Land* ..... .05

The Comity Report, by H. Paul Douglass ..... .15
(Some Protestant Churches in America)

Rural Prospect, by Mark Rich ..... .50

Cooperative Churches, by Ralph A. Felton ..... .10

A Farmer Talks to His Son, by Nathaniel A. Talmage ..... .05
(Reprint of article in *Town and Country Church)*

Send your orders to the Department of Town and Country Church, National Council of Churches, 257 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

Rural Development Program

• The Rural Development Program being carried on in areas where low-income farming is a chronic and serious problem is now in process in almost one hundred counties of thirty states, the Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra T. Benson, stated in the second annual report on the Program. Five federal departments are represented in this program of offering technical assistance to pilot counties and areas. The Secretary of Agriculture calls it an "approach to balanced farm, industry, and community development."

"For those rural people who have the desire and ability to develop an efficient farm unit, there are special adult education projects and technical assistance aimed at their special needs.

"Vocational training, labor surveys, and industrial development are being emphasized for those who choose non-farm employment. In many of these pilot areas, projects have also been started leading to improved education, better health and sanitation, and community development."

The Secretary quotes from a report by the South Carolina Rural Development Committee: "One of the most valuable elements of the Rural Development Program has been found to be the strength that comes from the combined efforts of farmers, business and civic leaders, and representatives of agencies and organizations working together as a team on county rural development committees. These committees, built around local agricultural, business and civic leaders, are proving to be an effective force in getting programs and activities under way aimed at improving the lot of low-income farm families. The program has also been helpful in getting the low-income families to become interested in helping themselves."

More than 1,000 citizens are members of local rural development committees, the Secretary stated. Various government agencies supply most of the professional workers for the numerous projects of the program. These projects now number 350 and are briefly described in the report as follows:

"This new approach to the economic improvement of depressed rural areas is having a growing im-

pact in many rural development counties and trade areas. Plans for specific development projects long dormant have been revived and given new life. Chambers of Commerce and industrial development groups have strengthened their membership and entered into closer ties with the rest of the community. Economic resources of considerable potential have been uncovered in the systematic surveys and studies are going forward in a majority of counties. More than 350 new development projects in agriculture, forestry, marketing, industry promotion, health and vocational training are reported.

"These projects, planned and put together at the county and area level to meet specific needs, include many different skills, and farm and nonfarm resources. They are a direct result of the interest, planning and enterprise generated by the Rural Development Program.

"In Avoyelles Parish, La., for example, one community is taking the role of 'demonstration community,' adopting improved agricultural practices on an intensive basis.

"The rural development committee in Perry County, Ind., joined with its county commissioners to put together a systematic road improvement program.

"Price County, Wis., is capitalizing on peat deposits and scrub timber by introducing several new industries utilizing these raw materials.

"Markets are being established for preserved foods, handicrafts and clothing made in the farm homes of Anson County, N. C.

"New opportunities for vocational training in industrial arts have been developed in Macon County, Tenn.

"A loading yard is being built to handle logs for paper manufacture in Chilton County, Ala.

"Women leaders in Santa Fe County's (New Mexico) rural development have started a series of lectures on health throughout the farm communities.

"This report is concerned in great part with a description of these and many other specific projects which are lifting the level of living—and more important the spirit and hope—of low-income farming areas taking part in the Rural Development Program."

A "resource survey" is usually the starting point, and nearly eighty surveys and studies are reported in forty-five of the pilot areas.

What is a typical pilot county? This question is discussed in the report, and an answer is given in the report, as follows:

"The pilot county or trade area (several counties around a trading center) is the basic unit in which the Rural Development Program operates. Pilot counties are what might be called 'laboratories' for the organization and promotion of balanced economic development.

"They differ considerably in potential resources, crops, climate, manpower, and social conditions.

"Dent County in the Missouri Ozarks has less than 1,500 farm families, on farms that are half in timber.

"In Sandoval County, New Mexico, a majority of the Spanish-American farm families live on tiny plots of land and enjoy few health, education, and recreation facilities.

"Stevens County, Wash., recently named to the program by the state committee, produces mainly wheat, feed grains, and hay. Many farms in the county have large acreage.

"The eastern Kentucky trade area—twelve counties—needs better transportation and marketing outlets. In southern West Virginia, it's increased industrialization to fill the gap left by declining farm opportunities and limited farm potential.

"Development work in these and other counties and areas is planned and organized within their own boundaries. No agency or administrator imposes a program that the people do not want, and that they have no hand in originating. A detailed consideration of the plans and projects in one pilot county—Avoyelles Parish, La.—will show how this plan operates.

"Avoyelles Parish might be called a typical underdeveloped rural area. It has the same economic problems that affect many other rural counties in the region: Adjustment to agricultural changes, need for industrial and other job opportunities, financing health, education and other community projects. Avoyelles is typical, also, in its Rural Development Program. Like many other pilot counties, this parish began program operations in 1957 and has now reached the point where rural development workers and committeemen have started special projects which will help local people help themselves. The program in Avoyelles Parish has begun moving from the survey and planning stage to the project stage.

"Located in the east central part of Louisiana, this parish has less than half its acreage under cultivation. The rest of the land is timber and swamp, along the many rivers and bayous. There are about 4,400 farms in the parish, seventy per cent of them owner-operated, nearly two-thirds selling less than $2,500 worth of products. More than half the adults in the parish earn their living directly from farming. The percentage of young people—between the ages of 15 and 24—continues to decline."

Congress has made an appropriation amounting to $2,589,342 for the fiscal year of 1958 to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the rural development program. The Farmers' Home Administration was also granted authorization to make loans to farm operators totaling $15,000,000 in the same fiscal year. It is the policy of those administrating the program to encourage the participation of church leaders in the various local programs.

—B. Y. L.

Duty

When Duty comes a-knocking at your gate,
Welcome him in; for if you bid him wait,
He will depart only to come once more
And bring seven other duties to your door.

—Edwin Markham

When Minor is Major

E. W. MUELLER

• The Doles were a churched family who lived in the suburb of a mid-west city. The family held membership in St. John's Lutheran Church where the three oldest children attended Sunday school. Mr. Dole assisted the superintendent with the well-organized school, and Mrs. Dole taught in the primary department until the arrival of a new baby. Each Sunday the Dole family filled an entire pew in the new church that had been built with assistance from the Mission Board.

The father was a farm boy, while the mother had grown up in the older section of a big city. Both were college graduates. After leaving college they were married and came to the city since Mr. Dole had been offered a position as a department supervisor in an aircraft plant. Here they lived in a very modest home in an older section. Mr. Dole understood his work and applied himself.

After five years Mr. Dole was promoted to the position of a junior executive. This advancement made a considerable difference in family income, and before too long the Doles went house hunting. They found the type of home they wanted in a new neighborhood which was very much to their liking. The house provided adequately for the needs of their growing family. The spacious back yard gave opportunity for the children to play and for outdoor living. Three Lutheran churches, each with a good program and adequate facilities, were more convenient to them than the Lutheran church had been to their former home. St. John's, where the family held membership, was within walking distance while the other two churches were about three miles in opposite directions.

The Doles adjusted to their new community very quickly. Before they knew it they had become involved in church and community activities. The children had their circle of friends in school, in church, and in the neighborhood. The future looked bright. Mr. Dole was confident that he was doing satisfactory work. He had concrete evidence of that in additional responsibilities assigned to him. While he was looking for further advancement, it came as a blow to the entire family when he was asked to manage a new plant in a town in Michigan.

There the Doles could find no house to rent or to buy. It meant building a new home. They did what many others were doing in the area. From a farmer, they bought a few acres about five miles from town. Mr. Dole immediately took over his new duties. He looked after the building of the new home, and as soon as it was completed the family moved. The children were enrolled in the town school which provided free transportation, and they joined the Lutheran church located in the open country. The five-mile drive on the black-topped road which wound its way around hills, through clumps of trees, and past neatly-kept farmsteads, was particularly pleasant on sunny mornings.

The pastor had called on Mr. Dole before the family came. But becoming a part of this congregation had its difficulties. They were received into formal membership as soon as their letter of transfer arrived. This, however, did not give them a sense of belonging. They did not seem to have anything in common with the other members except that they were Lutherans. Ever since Mr. Dole had spoken up in a congregational meeting, he felt that there was some resentment toward him. They were members; they enjoyed the worship service; but there was little opportunity for participation. The pastor proclaimed the same Christ-centered message. In Sunday school the children heard the same Bible stories and studied the same catechism. The members were good wholesome people. The things that were different were minor, yet they were major obstacles to genuine Christian fellowship.

This country congregation was proud of its new and very adequate church building. They had a history that tied them to pioneer days. There were definite patterns of church work. It is understandable that the old residents would consider newcomers with different ideas as intruders.

The experience of the Doles is very real for many a family. Job opportunities and the assignments of new positions make necessary the movement from community to community. Many people are meeting their housing and living needs by buying plots of ground out in the open country. These people are being referred to as the rural non-farm population. They live in the country, but they receive their family income from employment other than agriculture. Their interest does not center in farming. In many sections the rural non-farm population is growing faster than the urban population. This shift in population to a great degree stems from the fact that one agricultural worker can now supply the food and fiber needs of twenty other persons. So we have rural communities where the farm population is going down and the rural non-farm population is increasing very rapidly.

The point is not whether the old members are wrong and the newcomers are right. The point is that a new rural society is emerging and the church must bring an effective ministry to all the people in the new rural community.

Soil technicians have classified soil into eight different types. They have developed the principle that every piece of ground be used according to its capacity and treated according to its needs. Maybe this is an approach to which church planners need to give some thought.

The story of the Dole family puts into focus five types of communities:

1. The father's boyhood farm community where the population is declining.

2. The mother's girlhood big city community, being greatly affected by economic and cultural changes.

3. The modest old urban community in which the family first lived.

4. The new suburban community with expansion problems in which they bought their first home.

5. The open country community with its growing non-farm population in which they built their home on an acreage.

The needs and the problems of each community are different. A responsible congregation will make an effort to really know its community. This will not affect the message, but its methods. Church bodies and congregations should consider the following items:

1. Keep in mind that the seminary trains men for the ministry, but a pastor serves in a congregation in a community.

2. Plan to make congregations accessible to many before making them convenient to a few.

3. Foster the spirit of our pioneers in founding the church, but not necessarily the patterns they established. Distinguish between basic values and patterns set up to transmit these values.

4. Help people to understand that often what they want is not what they need to develop an effective program.

5. Emphasize that the greater the changes a community experiences, the greater the need for adjustment of local congregational programs.

6. Encourage the acceptance of new skills in working with people.

7. Have an open mind on new methods of communicating our message.

Life

Life is an arrow—therefore you must know
What mark to aim at, how to draw the bow—
Then draw it to the head and let it go.

—Henry van Dyke

Luoma Photo

Twelve Years in a Larger Parish

• The Parish of the Larger Vision, one of the two oldest larger parishes in the Illinois Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., was organized in 1945. The Rev. Duff Tucker became director and has continued to serve as director of the parish and supervisor of McCormick Seminary students working in the area.

In 1945 the parish included Brooklyn, Chili, Clayton, Fairmount, Hersman, Lee, Mt. Horeb, Mt. Sterling and Perry, Illinois. Brooklyn and Chili illustrate the changing agricultural scene and were closed after a thorough survey of the field. They were replaced by two other churches, so at present the Parish of the Larger Vision consists of nine churches with the county seat church of Mt. Sterling more or less in the center.

In all instances the churches of this parish have provided more adequate facilities for worship, young people's work and social life. This has meant better buildings, a new curriculum and a teaching ministry.

But the Parish of the Larger Vision has not concerned itself entirely with furthering the denominational program. Its churches have been active in farm and interdenominational activities.

From its inception the parish has been a training parish for McCormick Seminary. As the parish is rural it has appealed to seminarians interested in rural work. But as the Church cannot (in its largest concept) be divided into rural and ur-

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New England Rural Church Conference

• "Social Education and Action in the Town and Country Church" will be the theme of the 32nd annual New England Rural Church Workers Conference to be held at Ocean Park, Maine, June 23-27, 1958. The Rev. John W. Thomas, executive secretary of the Council on Social Progress of the American Baptist Convention, will focus the work of the conference by giving three addresses on the theme—one each morning. The area will then be explored by four seminar workshops in a search for new solutions to persistent problems. The first of these will study Small Industry, under the leadership of Mr. Jere Chase, director of Rural Development, University of New Hampshire. The Rev. William Hudson, Lunenberg, Mass., will lead a workshop on Standards of Morality, and the Rev. Ralph Greiser of Canaan, Conn., will lead on Areas of Hostility. The field of Cooperatives and Credit will be explored in a workshop led by Mr. Leo Savage, treasurer of the Gilman (Vt.) Credit Union. The reports and findings from these workshops will be presented to the conference and discussed at its final session.

The Rev. Walter Brockway, Congregational Life Minister serving at Seabrook, N. H., under the New Hampshire Congregational Conference and chairman of the conference, has arranged this program with the assistance of the following ministers: Curtis Smith of Lancaster, N. H.; Sidney Pearson of Antim, N. H.; Albert Snow and Robert Walker, both of Ashland, N. H. The Rev. Philip Steinmetz, associate to the general secretary of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, will serve as chaplain.

This conference is sponsored each year by the New England Town and Country Commission, which will hold its annual meeting during the sessions. Members of the John Frederick Oberlin Fellowship of New England will also hold an annual meeting during the sessions (complete with sociability over crackers and cheese).

The findings of the conference will be made available in printed form and may be obtained from the Rev. Gladys York, Secretary, Route 2, Cumberland Center, Maine, or from the Rev. Gertrude Harris, director of Public Relations, Greenville Junction, Maine.

It is hoped that many workers in the area of town and country church work will attend this conference. The cost is $13.80 per person, with special rates for children. Scholarships are available. For further information write to the secretary, the Rev. Gladys York, Route 2, Cumberland Center, Maine.

Forget It

If you see a tall fellow ahead of the crowd,
A leader of music, marching fearless and proud,
And you know of a tale whose mere telling aloud
Would cause his proud head to in anguish be bowed,
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.

If you know of a skeleton hidden away
In a closet, and guarded and kept from the day
In the dark; whose showing, whose sudden display
Would cause grief and sorrow and lifelong dismay,
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.

If you know of a spot in the life of a friend
(We all have spots concealed, world without end)
Whose touching his heartstrings would play or rend,
Till the shame of its showing no grieving could mend,
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.

If you know of a thing that will darken the joy
Of a man or a woman, a girl or a boy,
That will wipe out a smile or the least way annoy
A fellow, or cause any gladness to cloy,
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.

—UNKNOWN

BOOK REVIEWS

The Rural Church Movement. By Mark Rich. Juniper Knoll Press, Columbia, Mo. 1957. $3.50.

One of the contributions of any good history is to bring to the attention of historically provincial people that things weren't always as they are now. This is the first contribution Mark Rich has made to modern understanding of the rural church movement. For example, we take for granted that the rural church is, among other things, one social institution among many social institutions in rural society. This has not always been accepted, and the discovery of this fact is coincidental with the formal beginnings of the rural church movement, according to Dr. Rich's chronology. For those of us who are steeped in the sociological point of view, this is a good corrective to our provinciality.

This history is written by a professor for students in theological seminaries, and a textbook usually doesn't have entertainment as one of its primary aims. It is a methodical plodding through the necessary historical facts to come to an understanding of a significant movement. And this is all right with me.

The real heart of this book comes at the end, and this is Dr. Rich's interpretation of the chronology he has just presented. The rural church movement really was born when some men of God had a fresh hearing of the Gospel for their day, and they preached it with conviction. The rural church movement has its sole validity in this fact, and it can claim its present and future integrity on this single proclamation. As in the past, the vitality of this movement will be seen in its faithfulness to the Gospel, in many divergent views clashing creatively with each other—and so the movement moves.

—WESLEY A. HOTCHKISS

Reflection Books

The Bible When You Need it Most. By T. Otto Nall.

Questions and Answers on Religion. By Jack Finegan.

Modern Man Looks at the Bible. By William Neil.

Denominations—How We Got Them. By Stanley I. Stuber.

Religion and Health. Edited by Simon Doniger.

Ten Makers of Modern Protestant Thought. Edited by George L. Hunt.

These six paper-back books represent the second set of "Reflection Books" published by Association Press, New York. Published March, 1958, they sell for 50 cents a copy—or 12 for $5.00. They are in fact religious education books to increase the theological literacy of laymen and may be purchased in local book stores.

Selected Rural Fiction*

The Lord's Oysters. By Gilbert Byron. Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass.

Without plot but full of incident and continuous underlying humor, this story is redolent of the life of the river and its villages in the slow-moving Eastern shore of Maryland. Told by an artless lad in the vernacular of that place at that time—early in the 1900's.

Sing Out the Glory. By Gladys Hasty Carroll. Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass.

Solidity characterizes this latest of Mrs. Carroll's rural novels. Woven of mild and somewhat sentimental local lore of a New England valley and the expanding history of our whole country. When the relating child reaches adulthood, reality begins and interest quickens.

Edge of Darkness. By Mary Ellen Chase. W. W. Norton & Co., New York.

Tender and perceptive review of long life of a seafaring wife and her later years in a remote fishing village in Maine. Miss Chase needs no introduction.

Dunbar's Cove. By Borden Deal. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Conveying vividly (although with some blemishes) the sweep, enthusiasm and excitement of the TVA experiment, this author gives dual insight: the staunch loyalty to land and holdings among deep-rooted mountain people; the ardent, apostle-like devotion of many TVA workers to the giant undertaking and its ultimate benefits to the people.

Amos Jackman. By Daniel Doan. The Beacon Press, Boston, Mass.

Fate of farmers and farm life as industry and its effects invade the hill country of New Hampshire in the 1930's permeates this moving story.

The Believers. By Janice Hold Giles. Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass.

Another authentic story by a careful yet prolific writer. Around 1800, the Shakers, as they are usually known, founded two strict settlements in Kentucky. Rural folk mostly were attracted. This is an absorbing account of daily life in one of the settlements and its effect on individuals and families who cast their all into the enterprise—or found they could not do so.

The Nine Mile Circle. By Pati Hill. Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass.

Written in a modern style that is stimulating to some and irritating to others, these disjointed chapters give a unique looking-glass reflection of a set of persons and situations essentially true in our rural or semi-rural Deep South of yesterday and today. The idiom is effective and the oblique characterization is almost visual.

Blue Camellia. By Frances Parkinson Keyes. Julian Messner, Inc., New York.

Entered here because of the description and narration of the breeding, growing, milling, and distribution of rice, in pioneer southwestern Louisiana, around Crowley, near the turn of the century. Fictionized to include interwoven romance. Cajun lore is included.

The Lady. By Conrad Richter. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

A polished gem. This selection from the chronicle of the regal family in New Mexico, on their great Spanish grant of land of sixty years ago, with their power over peons, and their potent local influence in revealing rural social history. A shadow of melancholy, mysterious and baffling, in spite of the brilliant coloring of the Southwest, foretells a certain inherent tragedy of time, people, and place.

Mrs. Daffodil. By Gladys Tabor. J. P. Lippincott, Philadelphia, Pa.

Listed as a novel, this series of sketches is full of humor and compassion. It recites the experiences of two contemporary ladies in New England who by preference live deep in the country. But friends in numbers find them out. It is a Mary-and-Martha arrangement that seems to succeed. And dogs are everywhere.

The Fruit Tramp. By Vinnie Williams. Harper and Brothers, New York.

Not before have the itinerant workers of the East, who follow crops from Florida to Maine, been well reported on. Fresh and remarkably informed, even to details along the way, but with emphasis on Florida, this vividly humanized and unpretentious fictional document is a lively contribution. It is built around a growing boy and his unique uncle.

(*Continued from Page* 13)

ban it has been worked out that student ministers and parish workers of the Larger Vision have gone into every type of service: foundation directors, ministers of city churches, ministers of county seat churches, seminary staff members, social service workers, inter-racial workers as well as rural ministers.

Probably, the thirty seminary men and women who since 1945 have gone out from the Larger Parish are the Parish's largest bonus.

—From *Presbyterian Progress in Illinois*

* Prepared by Caroline B. Sherman, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Through Groups to God

A meditation by W. Randolph Thornton

MAN'S deepest need is to live and be loved.
But man is lonely,
because he doesn't feel he can trust his goodness
and his badness
to his fellowmen.
So he wears a mask of superficial respectability.
He tries to compensate for his loneliness
by surrounding himself with labor-saving gadgets,
prestige-producing possessions,
and attention-absorbing amusements.
But to no avail,
for man is not a thing—he is a person—
made to respond and be responded to;
made for interaction and communication
with other persons and with God.

✣ + +

In his loneliness man looks toward the church,
hoping to find an alternative to his futility—
a sense of belonging and of being wanted.
But often the minister is too busy officiating;
the laymen are too busy raising money.
Despite their polite remarks, a stranger feels
they really don't want *him*—
because as a new member he might threaten
the smug complacency of things as they are.
So the lonely soul turns away
and keeps searching for the meaning of his life,
and the deep companionship of any
who will accept him as he is,
and give him a chance to invest his life
in a cause which will outlast it.

+ + +

But all churches are not like this.
Some day he may find his way into a church
where there is a God-filled, redemptive fellowship—
where they treat him as a person with feelings,
where they look him in the eye
and really listen to *him*—
not just to his words,
but to the deeper longings from his loneliness.
Here is a church made up of small groups
of seeking and accepting souls
who once were lonely, too,
but are now engaged in removing their masks
and getting to know one another as they really are.
Their candor and frankness are refreshing.

✣ + +

This is what he has been seeking;
this is real.
The members don't act self-righteous and superior.
They honestly accept him just as he is.
He doesn't have to pretend to be prominent
in his business,
socially influential,
or economically affluent.
Such things don't seem to matter to this group.
All they expect him to be is just himself—
a person, that's all.
He heaves a sigh of relief and relaxation.
In this free atmosphere
tension and fear are gone;
stiffness and formality have disappeared.
He feels a sense of release and creativity.
Here at last he can say just what he thinks
and still be accepted.
He belongs now—
not because he subscribed to a doctrine,
not because he signed a membership card,
but because he gave a glimpse of his inner life
to this group in confidence.
And they proved worthy of his trust;
they accepted him with all his loneliness
and inadequacy
and loved him in spite of himself—
because they felt that God had first loved them.
It was not a one-way giving, either.
The members of this group dared
to entrust their inner thoughts and feelings
and even their sins
to him, who had so recently been a stranger.
Somehow this group was different.
The members sat in a circle or around a table.
There was no leader, for they were all leaders.
They weren't afraid of silence, as most groups are.
They just listened,
and somehow communication was taking place—
a still, small voice was speaking to each
in the inner recesses of his own soul.
Call it the Voice of God;
call it the Holy Spirit.
New thoughts flashed into their minds;
new insights emerged.
All felt the warmth of a common understanding
and a new closeness to one another, and to God.

+ + +

"This must be Christ's true church,"
he said. "This experience has magnetic power.
You can't keep me away from groups like this;
for where two or three are gathered together
in Christ's name—
there He is in the midst of them.
It is just what I needed;
my loneliness is ended;
I have tasted reality;
I know a group that understands me, and loves me.
Now I have a reason for living, a mission in life.
As a 'member-leader' in this group
I can help in accepting others as lonely as I was.
I can share myself with them;
but more than that, I can share our Christ—
who would become their Christ, too."

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